

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the tragic and startling attacks of September 11, 2001, our country faces a new threat which, like that of terrorism, will require years of sacrifice and will most certainly challenge our resolve and stretch our comfort zones. Nevertheless, it is a battle which must be fought.

One year ago, Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, bluntly stated "The most significant threat to our national security is our debt." While our debt crisis has not arrived with horrific explosions and shocking loss of life as we witnessed a decade ago, the political struggle to come to terms with its grip on our future has already wrenched our country and sent shockwaves around the globe.

Unlike the 9/11 terror attacks, the realization that America must come together to defeat this new foe has, unfortunately, not united our land or its leaders. We recall in the hours after the terror attacks Americans from all political stripes and walks of life rallying around our flag in support of each other, and in support of our nation and the new challenge it faced. America can overcome any trial as long as we are united in the fight. Triumph over our crushing national debt will demand courage and sacrifice. Because this battle is largely to combat the self-destructive habits which have given rise to our debt crisis, the road to victory must begin with a realization that our culture of overspending must end.

The first step to reverse our nation's decline was taken last week with the passage of an agreement whose impact is still reverberating in Washington. While the agreement that House Speaker John Boehner forged with the president does not immediately solve the debt crisis, it is a significant maneuver to stop the bleeding.

Given the resistance of the president and the Senate to practically any spending reductions, it is remarkable the House was able to negotiate a deal that practically redefines the spending culture of Washington. For the first time in many of our lifetimes, there is acceptance by our leaders and the majority of Americans that government must live within its means.

To win the war however, we have to change the culture. The Budget Control Act that passed into law last week forces all of Washington to finally acknowledge the debt crisis through spending reduction targets that have real teeth. Granted, these initial cuts are modest, but they lay the foundation for a new direction that lawmakers must follow. New spending will be offset

by equal or greater cuts and Congress will be forced to vote on a Balanced Budget Amendment.

To avoid more damage to our fragile economy, the agreement immediately raises the debt ceiling in two steps by \$900 billion so the federal government can meet its obligations through the end of the year. However, it is not a blank check. It requires that increase be offset by spending cuts (\$917 billion over ten years). The president does not get an additional debt ceiling increase taking us to early 2013 until Congress approves a further \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts.

The initial discretionary spending cuts would be enforced by spending caps. If Congress fails to follow through, these cuts will be mandated through across-the-board spending cuts.

An additional \$1.2 trillion in spending cuts will be identified by a special bipartisan Congressional committee that meets this fall. The committee's recommended spending reductions must be approved in full by Congress or automatic, across-the-board discretionary spending cuts (called sequestration) will occur after 2013. Either way, federal spending cuts will be implemented.

Lastly, the agreement calls for a vote on a Balanced Budget Amendment by the end of the year. In order for such an amendment to be ratified, the Constitution requires a two-thirds vote of support by both the U.S. House and Senate and passage by three-fourths of the state legislatures. An additional \$300 billion in borrowing authority is tied to congressional passage of a Balanced Budget Amendment.

Admittedly, these steps to slow down government overspending are modest when viewed in the context of enormity of the \$14.3 trillion national debt. However, they should not be seen as the only ones Congress will take to address the debt crisis. They represent the first down a path of many such steps provided the American people continue to support the efforts of conservatives in Congress to accomplish these goals.

No one is kidding themselves that the debt can be erased in a year. But we must start now by demanding offsetting cuts and changing the historically predominant view in Washington that overspending is acceptable. We can only prevail in this long battle if Americans continue to demand that all their elected leaders, including the president, are united in this goal.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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